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SUBJECT: UZBEKISTAN'S SYSTEM OF PRIMARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION AT A  
GLANCE

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¶1. (SBU) Summary: A contact recently provided a copy of a government document entitled "Index of the Ministry of Public Education for the 2007-2008 Academic Year," which provides a useful snapshot of the country's primary and secondary education system. The document shows that few students study at Russian-language schools; teachers are well-educated; and that the teacher to student ratio is relatively low. It also hints at a declining birth rate since independence. As the document is from last year, it does not reflect the transition from 9 to 12-year mandatory free secondary education, which is expected to be completed in 2009 (septel). Undoubtedly, the government has made primary and secondary education reform a major priority in recent years and has invested significant funds into refurbishing old schools and building new ones, particularly in rural regions. Nevertheless, the quality of education still suffers due to low teacher salaries, the use of outdated teaching methodologies, and a lack of teaching resources. Separately, contacts also have discussed the current state of Uzbekistan's system of higher education with Cultural Affairs Officer (septel). End summary.

FEW STUDENTS NOW STUDYING PRIMARILY IN RUSSIAN

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¶2. (SBU) Interestingly, the document demonstrates that a wide variety of foreign languages are taught in Uzbek schools, including Russian, Karakalpak, Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Tajik, and Turkmen. However, the overall number of students studying at schools where the primary language of instruction is Russian has greatly declined since independence. Last year, only 5.3 percent of students in Uzbekistan studied at Russian-language schools. In contrast, nearly 89 percent of students studied at Uzbek-language schools (though an unknown percentage of those students continued to take Russian as a foreign language). The statistics not only point to a general decline in the use of Russian in Uzbekistan since independence, but also suggests that Russian will continue to lose relevance over time.

## TEACHERS ARE RELATIVELY WELL-EDUCATED (BUT POORLY PAID)

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¶3. (U) The document also shows that teachers in Uzbekistan are relatively well-educated for a developing country. Nearly 70 percent of teachers at Uzbek primary and secondary schools have a university degree, while a majority of the remaining teachers either have some university education or received a teaching degree from a vocational school. The document also shows a relatively low teacher to student ratio of approximately 12 students per each teacher.

¶4. (SBU) While teachers in Uzbekistan are relatively well-educated, they remain poorly paid. In previous years, teachers could make as little as 40 dollars a month, and wages were not always paid on time. Many teachers are forced to moonlight as private tutors, often for their own students, or in other jobs to make ends meet, which has a negative impact on the quality of education that Uzbek students receive. Recently, teacher wages have increased, and most teachers now appear to make roughly 100 dollars a month on average. Nevertheless, the effect of this wage increase has been dulled by relatively high levels of inflation in recent years. Corruption in the educational system, including grade-buying, remains endemic. Another problem is that many teachers, who were either educated in the Soviet era or in the

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early post-Soviet era, still employ outdated teaching methodologies. There is also a dearth of quality Uzbek-language textbooks.

## TRYING TO DIVINE DEMOGRAPHIC DATA FROM LIMITED SOURCES

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¶5. (SBU) Acquiring reliable demographic data is particularly challenging in Uzbekistan, where the government has refrained from carrying out an official census since independence (Note: Some observers contend the government fears a census because it would show that the ethnic Tajik portion of the population is much larger than officially reported or would reveal the true extent of labor outmigration from the country in recent years. End note.) Interestingly, the Education Ministry document reports that there were approximately one million more students studying in grades five to nine in 2007-2008 than in grades one to four. Along the same lines, the Ministry of Education recently reported that 5,180,217 students are attending Uzbeks schools this academic year (septel), a decline from the 5,390,490 students who were reportedly attending Uzbek schools last year. While it is difficult to draw reliable conclusions from such limited data, the document nevertheless hints at a gradually declining birth rate since independence (Note: Multiple other sources reported that the overall population of Uzbekistan grew last year and now stands at approximately 28.3 million, while 42 percent of the population is under 18 years old of age. End note.) The percentage of Uzbek children attending school is still believed to be almost 100 percent.

## STATISTICS FROM MINISTRY OF EDUCATION DOCUMENT

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16. (U) Some of the more interesting statistics from the Ministry of Education document include:

Number of Schools: 9,765

Number of Students at Primary and Secondary Schools: 5,390,490

- Students in grades 1 to 4: 2,071,785
- Students in grades 5 to 9: 3,024,196
- Students in grades 10 to 11: 294,509

Number of Teachers at Primary and Secondary Schools: 450,327 (68 percent of whom are women)

Educational Background of School Teachers:

- Number of teachers with university degrees: 308,560 (68.5 percent)
- Number of teachers who attended but did not complete university: 20,847 (4.6 percent)

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- Number of teachers who completed vocational school: 120,920 (26.9 percent)

Number of Pedagogical Institutes: 5

- Number of pedagogical institute instructors: 2,683
- Number of pedagogical institute students: 35,638

Number of Teacher Training Colleges: 16

Number of Schools by language of instruction:

- Uzbek: 8,867
- Russian: 739
- Kazakh: 505
- Karakalpak: 383
- Tajik: 267
- Kyrgyz: 62
- Turkmen: 50

(Note: As the number of schools by language listed above exceeds the total number of schools reported in the first line, it is most likely that schools with two primary languages of instruction are counted twice. Contacts in Bukhara and Samarkand also have reported the closing of virtually all Tajik-language schools in those cities, though Tajik-language schools may operate elsewhere, and some Uzbek-language schools in Bukhara and Samarkand with a

majority of Tajik-speaking students and teachers might still be officially counted as Tajik-language, even if the instruction is now mainly in Uzbek. End note.)

#### Number of Students by language of instruction

- Uzbek: 4,792,685 (88.9 percent)
- Russian: 287,414 (5.3 percent)
- Karakalpak: 106,252 (1.9 percent)
- Kazakh: 89,040 (1.65 percent)
- Tajik: 92,523 (1.7 percent)
- Kyrgyz: 12,637 (.23 percent)
- Turkmen: 9,939 (.18 percent)

#### Number of Specialized Schools for Disabled Children: 89

- Schools for the blind: 13
- Schools for the deaf: 18
- Schools for the mentally handicapped: 53

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- Schools for children with orthopedic problems: 1
- Schools for children with severe speech problems: 1
- Schools for "difficult children": 3
- Total number of students at such schools: 18,923

#### Number of Orphanages: 28

- Number of children at orphanages: 2,790
- Number of "family type" orphanages (where children live with foster parents): 5
- Number of children at "family type" orphanages: 50

#### Number of preschool organizations: 6,232

- Number of preschool teachers: 57,737
- Number preschool students: 554,171
- Number of private daycare facilities: 60

#### TRANSITION TO 12-YEAR FREE SECONDARY EDUCATION

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17. (U) The Ministry of Public Education reported that Uzbekistan's transition from 9-year to 12-year mandatory free secondary education would be fully implemented two years ahead of schedule in 2009. Students will now attend primary and secondary schools to grade 9, and then colleges (vocational schools) or lyceums (academic-focused high schools) for grades 10 through 12. To accommodate the switch to a 12-year system, the government has

invested enormous sums over the last decade to build approximately 1,100 new colleges and lyceums, which are clearly visible to anyone who travels around the country. The government also has spent large sums in recent years to refurbish old primary and secondary schools and to open new ones. However, some residents complain that the government is pouring money into primary and secondary schools, whose graduates will not be able to find jobs or study at university upon graduation (septel).

#### UZBEKISTAN'S SYSTEM OF HIGHER EDUCATION

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18. (U) Contacts also have described the current state of higher education in discussions with Emboffs over the past year. One of the major complaints reported by contacts is that the growth of the higher education system has not kept pace with population growth. Uzbekistan currently lags behind almost all of its Central Asian neighbors in university enrollment. The World Bank recently reported that only 8 percent of Uzbek students who completed secondary school were accepted into Uzbek universities.

#### COMMENT

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19. (SBU) Undoubtedly, the government has made primary and secondary education reform a major priority in recent years. The expansion of mandatory free secondary education to 12 years is a positive development. In recent years, the government also has poured significant funds into refurbishing old schools and building new ones, particularly in rural areas, where the need for new schools is greatest. However, the quality of education in Uzbekistan still suffers due to the poor wages paid to teachers, which encourages corruption and forces many teachers to work second jobs. Instead of devoting nearly all of the funds earmarked for education into constructing new schools, a more effective approach would be to use some of the money to raise teacher salaries, purchase resources (including books and computers), develop quality Uzbek-language textbooks, and promote more modern teaching methodologies.

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